



Problems of Urban Universities: Library Services for the High School Student

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THE LIBRARY OF A COLLEGE or university situated in a city is often called upon to provide service for members of the community outside the campus limits. Presumably such a library in a small college town would face the same demand, but the degree would be different and the academic community would not be outnumbered by a hundred to one. No one will blame the urban college library for putting the needs of its faculty and student body first, but there is a feeling that it should serve the community as well. No one has put this into the form of an ethical principle, but no modern librarian likes to sit as a watch dog on his books; and besides, there is such a thing as good will and community support.

Therefore, there are favored classes, and each library must make its own selection: alumni, professional people such as doctors, teachers and ministers, and the research staffs of the laboratories maintained by industry. Undergraduates of other colleges in the same city will hardly be given borrowers' privileges, nor will high school students, but the question is, shall they be admitted to the library?

All users of libraries cost the library something: of course, normal wear and tear on building and books, and (more expensively) the demand upon staff time necessary to answer questions and locate materials. Beyond this, however, is the question of space, a problem recently canvassed by Metcalf with his usual perceptiveness as to the true costs of any library operation:

In most libraries the readers and reader services occupy far more space than books. A fair generalization, based on formulas that will

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be described in my book on library building planning, is that twenty-five square feet in a reading room, plus twenty-five square feet elsewhere in the building, are required for each reader and the services he needs. This total of fifty square feet may well cost something like one thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars in construction at today's prices. When the demands on a library approach the limit of its capacity, the student or professor from another institution who uses it does not simply occupy space that would otherwise go to waste; he hastens the day when a new building will be necessary. This point should not be overemphasized, but in a number of our metropolitan institutions it is pertinent.¹

It is just here that high school students pose the most serious problem for the urban college library, for they will almost certainly outnumber the college students, and they will come to the library to see the books, especially since they are not permitted to take them out. They pose other problems as well, in some ways more trying than those raised by adult users.

High school students are likely to be less familiar with the ways of using a large library and therefore make disproportionate demands upon the staff (probably already overburdened) in interpreting the card catalog and in locating material, in addition to asking all the questions which are the lot of reference librarians. They also usually arrive in the evening or on weekends when only part of the staff is on duty.

In the opinion of some librarians, but not all, high school students tend to be less respectful of library materials, indiscriminately removing volumes from the shelves and even tearing out pages. In this, it remains to be proved that high school students do more damage than any other kind of student, but certain it is that a civics class can move through the *Congressional Record* stacks like a swarm of locusts, leaving the shelves bare and creating a backbreaking job of replacement for the shelvees. This occurs, of course, in an open-stack library; in a closed-stack library the work will consist of bringing out the material for use.

Not all high school students come to a college library to use the *Congressional Record*, or indeed any record. For them it is a social function, perhaps a necessary part of growing up, but distracting. As a recent editorial in *The Thresher*, student newspaper of Rice University, said: "noise seems to increase with the influx of high schoolers who wish to use the facilities of the library. Not that Rice men are

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opposed to high school girls using the library; they literally welcome them with open arms." A concurring opinion is that of Edward Weeks of *The Atlantic Monthly*, at the dedication of the University of Akron Library, April 16, 1961: "I don't know which is more distracting, a reader with sniffles, or one who hums to himself as he turns the pages. But far worse than either is a well-stacked girl with a touch of perfume who keeps rearranging her legs."

Additional signs of the disruption of college students by the high school visitors are evident in the recent request of the Adviser to Women at Rice University that the library publicize standards of dress for female visitors. The Adviser had received complaints that high school girls were appearing in the library in shorts or slacks and that this mode of dress could be a reflection upon the young women enrolled in the University. This request was given point when the mother of a visiting high school girl called the Circulation Desk in an effort to locate her daughter; she stated that the young lady could be recognized from the fact that she was wearing peacock blue pedal-pushers.

This survey is confined to the high school students and libraries of Houston, Texas, a city with about one million people in its metropolitan area. Further, the study is largely from the point of view of the university librarians, based upon the reports of students and upon their own observations, not all of them susceptible of statistical proof. There is very little library literature on this subject, and if there were, it would have to be revised constantly and reinterpreted.

High school students in Houston may be impelled toward the college libraries in greater numbers than their counterparts in other cities. The U.S. Bureau of the Census in its "Preliminary Reports" for the 1960 census of population shows Houston to be among the 30 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas with population increases of 50 per cent or more between 1950 and 1960. This extraordinary expansion, added to the effects of a rise in education levels, has challenged the ingenuity and resources of the school systems. New school buildings have kept pace with the burgeoning population, and although the school libraries in Houston may be better than those in cities with older schools, they are below the recommendations in *Standards for School Library Programs*² for seating space, number of volumes, size of staff, and budgets.

The standards advocate 10 books per student for schools with more than 1,000 students after the school has been open four years. Among

the libraries of Houston high schools the highest ratio of books per student is 6.6 and one school which has been open for six years has only 3.3 books per student.

Seating capacity, according to the standards, should be for 10 per cent of the enrollment. The most generously planned Houston high school library can seat only 4.1 per cent of the students. Consequently there are severe limitations upon the time any student may use the school library. Outside of scheduled hours when a class visits the library, the student has but brief periods before school, during lunch time, and after school for using the library. The libraries in Houston high schools are open eight hours a day, generally from 7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., five days a week.

In cities where a strong public library has been developed with well-located, well-stocked branch libraries and resources to support growing services, high school pupils learn that the public library system can do much to supplement the high school library. In such situations the public libraries can coordinate their efforts with those of the schools, offering effective services which relieve the pressure upon the other libraries in the community. Houston does not enjoy such a happy situation. The total budget of the Houston Public Library is considerably less than that of the public libraries in all cities of comparable size around the country, and the book budget is actually less than the book budgets of the public libraries in Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and many other cities with smaller populations. The librarians of the Houston Public Library system are well aware of their responsibilities toward high school students, but their good intentions are hampered by the lack of sufficient financial support.

High school students in Houston who find their school library difficult to use during school hours, inaccessible or closed at times after school hours, or lacking the material they feel they need, are apt to be frustrated if they turn to the Public Library or one of its branches. In such circumstances, if a college library is convenient, or if it is suggested as a source by a parent who attended the college, by a friend attending the college, or by a high school teacher, the ambitious (or curious) high school student may venture into the college library. If he is not turned away and is not overawed, he may find that he can use the library to his advantage.

In Houston, all of the university libraries are attractive in appearance and of recent construction (the oldest dates from 1949). In

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addition, they are all air conditioned, an extremely important consideration in an area where summer weather begins early and lingers late.

In addition to those high school students seriously seeking better material, less crowded conditions, and longer time to use a library, others come to the college library for reasons less readily attributable to shortcomings of the school and public library systems. These may be drawn to the college library because it is close to their home, because of the attraction of studying in the collegiate setting, or because (in the case of the high school girls just mentioned) of hopes that their visits will not go unobserved by college boys.

The incidence of high school student use of the college and university libraries in Houston has been highest at the Fondren Library of Rice University and the M. D. Anderson Library of the University of Houston. The campus of Rice University is adjacent to large residential districts in which high schools are so located that many homes are considerably closer to the university than to the schools. The Houston Public Library is several miles removed from this area and the nearest branch library is, like the school libraries, not as accessible from much of the residential areas as is the university library. Thus, the physical situation of Fondren Library makes it convenient for many high school students. The library has the richest collection (392,000 volumes for 2,000 students) of any academic library in the city, and this collection attracts the high school student seeking a wide variety of library materials. The local prestige of Rice University undoubtedly serves as an added appeal to some.

The University of Houston is located in a more industrial area. Adjoining residential districts are not well served by the Houston Public Library or branch libraries, but they do include high schools more favorably situated to be convenient to students. Although the M. D. Anderson Library attracts fewer high school students than does Fondren Library, the enrollment of the University of Houston is 12,000, and the competition for the library collection of 232,000 volumes is such that a small number of high school students can be a proportionately greater burden.

The University of St. Thomas (enrollment 670) is less than a mile from Rice University and more on the fringe of the large residential sections. For these reasons and because the library collection is small (23,000 volumes), the number of high school students attracted to the library is at present not excessive.

Texas Southern University (founded for Negro students) has an enrollment of 3,600 and a library of 100,000 volumes. The campus, within a mile of the University of Houston, is easily accessible to only a small proportion of the city's high school students and a high school is several blocks away. The Texas Southern University library attracts a relatively small number of high school students.

The urgency of the problems of high school student use at the libraries of Rice and of the University of Houston, and the potential difficulties at the University of St. Thomas and Texas Southern University, led librarians from the four institutions to confer on this matter in the spring of 1961. Realizing that any action should be based upon better knowledge concerning the visits of high school students to the libraries, the librarians prepared a questionnaire form calculated to shed light on the motivations of the students, on the type and subject of the materials they sought, and on their methods of using the libraries. Copies of the questionnaire were made available to high school students using the four libraries during several weeks of the late spring and the early fall of 1961. Over 500 completed forms were turned in during these periods.

The total number of high school students visiting the four libraries while the survey was conducted was undoubtedly greater than the number of completed forms received. None of the libraries maintains a completely effective check point, and the methods of giving out and collecting forms did not assure complete coverage. Therefore, the fact that 85 per cent of the forms were received at Rice University, 10 per cent at the University of Houston, 3 per cent at Texas Southern University, and 2 per cent at the University of St. Thomas may not accurately reflect the differences in attendance.

The forms called for the name of the high school attended and the grade of the student, but not the name of the student. It was felt that omission of the latter might permit more candid answers. As might be expected, the largest number of high school students at any college library was from high schools serving residential areas close to the college, but among those visiting Fondren Library at Rice University there was at least one from each of 21 different junior or senior high schools, and 14 per cent were from schools more than three miles away from the campus. Forty-three per cent were high school 12th graders, 34 per cent were 11th graders, 18 per cent were 10th graders, and 5 per cent were 9th graders. Students of the two lower grades appeared more often during weekends than during the week. Dur-

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ing some weekends Fondren Library at Rice was host to over 100 high school pupils. The students of an independent college preparatory school constituted a sizable percentage.

To indicate their reason for using the library the students could check one of several statements or write their own explanation. Thirty-one per cent checked "The high school library does not have the material needed." However, there was no way of verifying if the resources of the high school library had indeed been exhaustively explored. One pupil visiting the M. D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston was asked by a librarian there if he had consulted his high school librarian for the material he wanted. He replied, seemingly unaware of this possibility, "No, I just looked for it myself at the school library and couldn't find it." The college librarian suggested that he ask his school librarian for help, and then, if the material could not be located there, he could return to the university library. This response may have opened up a new world for the pupil (unless it discouraged him) since he has not been observed at the university library again.

Twenty-five per cent of the forms were checked at the statement "The high school library is not open at this time." This is unquestionably a valid reason. None of the school libraries is open after four o'clock on week days; none is open at any time during weekends.

Nine per cent showed the reason for visiting the college library was that the Public Library either did not have the material or that it was not as easily accessible. One form included the complaint that there was no free parking at the Public Library.

Thirty-five per cent of the forms contained reasons for using the library, expressed in writing by the pupils. Of these the largest number indicated a search for better materials than were available in the school library. Representative statements are as follows: "Wider selection of books," "Needed more detailed information," "Far more periodicals than the school library has," "Debate sources are more comprehensive," "This library has more extra materials than needed," "Research themes usually require more references than the high school library has," "I feel that any material I wish to find is in this library," "To explore further into genetics."

The most frequent expressions showed that high school students visited the college library because it was closer than the high school library. Following this in frequency were indications of the appeal of such qualities as more space, quietness, less competition for books,

and the collegiate atmosphere. On one form the reason for using the library was a frank "to look at the boys" (a motivation suspected of many of the less out-spoken high school girls). Another explanation rather amazed the college librarians who often have difficulty in interpreting the card catalog to university faculty members: "It is so much easier to find the materials and to understand the card catalog."

Extensive use of the card catalog by high school pupils is evident in the fact that 85 per cent of the forms showed that the desired material was located by consulting the card catalog. The remaining 15 per cent indicated that help was obtained from a librarian or another user of the library.

The subject fields investigated were shown to be: history, 28 per cent; literature, 25 per cent; science, 11 per cent; social science, 9 per cent; current events, 8 per cent; philosophy, 4 per cent; religion, 4 per cent; arts, 3 per cent; languages, 2 per cent; and technology, 1½ per cent.

With regard to the form of the materials used the indications were as follows: general reference works, 31 per cent; books, 24 per cent; current periodicals, 12 per cent; a specific book, 11 per cent; and bound periodicals, 10 per cent. Nine per cent of the forms showed that the high school pupils brought their own books to the library for study purposes, and 3 per cent did not give any indication of use of material. It is assumed that these latter pupils either did not find any material they could use or were not in the library for the purpose of consulting any library materials.

The majority of the completed forms revealed that the purpose of using the material was for a report or theme. Ten per cent showed the purpose to be for a panel discussion or other types of classroom assignment, eight per cent showed that it was in preparation for a debate, and six per cent indicated that the visit to the library was for recreational reading or pleasure (whether for reading or otherwise was not always clear). One pupil, noting that a high school teacher had recommended the visit commented, "I couldn't find anything I wanted. This is too big and complicated. I will never come back."

The forms called for the students to show the length of time they spent in the college library. Twenty-five per cent indicated less than one hour (which is about the limit of time permitted for them to visit the high school library); 38 per cent showed a stay of from one to two hours; 22 per cent had been in the library for two to three hours;

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11 per cent stayed three to four hours; and 6 per cent used the library for a period of more than four hours.

The students who filled out the forms were asked to indicate whether they were visiting the library for the first time or had visited it previously. Twenty-nine per cent showed that they were in the library for the first time, and 71 per cent noted preceding visits. During the two periods of the survey (each of about three weeks' duration), 30 per cent of the high school students filled out more than one of the forms, and thus signified repeated visits to the library. It is apparent that some high school students are in the habit of using the college library regularly. This might be inferred from such statements made on the forms in explaining the reason for using the library as the following: "Just to study," "To do regular homework," "This library is closer, and open nights and Sundays."

When one considers the great variety of factors concerning the use of the college libraries by high school students—the different motivations, the diverse materials and methods they employ, and the varying degrees of library competence and intelligence—it is evident that there is no one sure way (except to exclude all high school students) of solving all the problems their visits pose for the college librarians and other users of the library. The most promising course probably lies in piecemeal methods calculated to improve particular situations.

Steps may be taken to give special treatment to, or perhaps take special precautions against, groups of high school students displaying similar patterns of college library use. The debaters, for instance, although they made up only 8 per cent of the students who filled out forms, seemed more prone to misuse library materials than did other groups. Debaters have been detected removing books and magazines from the college libraries without authorization. Some of these materials, when recovered, were found to be marked with guide tabs and to have many passages underlined in ink of various colors, obviously for ready reference, but the books and magazines were ruined for library use. This problem might best be met by communicating with all the debate coaches in the high schools and by suggesting that they caution their debaters against committing depredations on the libraries of the area. The instructors could escort their debaters to a college library, introduce them to the librarians, and explain their library needs. In addition, attempts might be made on a statewide basis to change a system which obviously puts too much pressure upon the young people involved by requiring infinite amounts of source ma-

terial and by giving bonus points for having the original books and articles produced on the platform. Such measures would result in more proper use of the college library materials by high school students preparing for debates.

Another group problem that it is possible to treat is that of the student unable to locate material needed for a classroom assignment in the high school library. The school libraries may be supplied with referral forms which the librarian fills out for the student to submit to a librarian in a college library. The college librarians are much more willing to take time to help high school students who present these forms, since they indicate that the resources of the high school library have first been thoroughly investigated. The forms are then returned to the school library and may assist the librarian in building up the subject area in which the form indicates a weakness.

Referral forms of this type have been furnished to Houston high school libraries during the past year by the M. D. Anderson Library of the University of Houston. The student may enter the library and use available books without a referral form, but he may not ask for the assistance of librarians without it. These forms are regarded as beneficial, but only a relatively small number have been presented. From this it would appear that very few of the students visiting the college library had actually asked their high school librarians for the material. Although the referral method does add a helpful element of control when high school students visit the college library on the suggestion of the high school librarian, it is of course not effective with students who frequent the college library because they live close to it, those who realize they need library material after the school library is closed, and those merely drawn by the college atmosphere or in hopes of meeting college students.

A long-range solution (or better, long-range plan, for there is no "solution") will be to encourage the buildup of public library service, particularly in a community like Houston where the public library is not yet supported as it should be. On many occasions the college librarian is tempted to be stony-hearted and to deny library privileges, in the hope that the disappointed applicant will go out and pressure the public libraries, or better, the Mayor and the City Council, into providing the books and services he needs. But he has an uneasy feeling, amounting almost to certainty, that things will not work out that way. Instead he will make an enemy for the college, and the public library will not be a whit the better.

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Similarly, long-range planning must aim at better high school libraries, but it does not seem likely that these can ever completely satisfy the needs of their own students. Even if a school library were open all afternoon, it would get little patronage. When school is out, the bus or the car pool is waiting, and the music lessons, dancing lessons, and football practice are about to begin.

A school library might receive more use in the evening if it could be kept open, but this is a very costly operation and not as simple as it sounds; usually the whole building would have to be kept open, or at least supervised, since it would be rare to find a high school library with its own entrance, adequately separated from the main building.

It has been said that college librarians should publicize the idea that their libraries are no substitute for good school and public library service. This statement is true up to a point, but one might as well say that public and high school libraries are usually no substitute for college libraries in those communities fortunate enough to have all three types.

The truth is that the high school student is here to stay, and the problem is to make the situation bearable, lest the Metcalf Law (referred to above) go into effect. High school libraries and the public libraries and their branches should be improved by all means, but even if this is done the population will still be pressing closely on its literary subsistence. As the Red Queen told Alice, "it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."

Perhaps the word should be *opportunity*, rather than *importance*, for here is an early chance to civilize and educate the young. Over the last forty years every college professor in the land has audibly wished that his students were better grounded in the fundamentals before they ever came to college. Surely library use is such a fundamental. Many professors are rightly disturbed at the lack of knowledge of even graduate students who can find their way to the catalog and to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* perhaps, but who are stymied when confronted with a real reference problem.

If one-half of what the national magazines say about future high school and college enrollment is true, there will be need for all the libraries obtainable. And if one-half of what they say about the severely-trained and grimly-determined Russian youngsters is true, there will be need for a generation whose serious education begins as early as possible.

No college wants to turn away its future students, but it has the right to a little protection. Turning itself into a reference library, with no lending of books except to its own people and to professional persons, is an obvious course. As to those who do come in, some sort of referral system may be the answer. The use of referral forms as permission to ask questions and receive services will save the librarians, but not the books or the space.

Nevertheless, a referral system, although its purpose can be defeated, will serve to reward the conscientious student and restrain the immature. There will undoubtedly be a demand from those who have not thought to obtain such a permission at school: perhaps a request slip, filled out and signed at the door, would impress the signer and provide the librarian with control of the student, who could not deny that he had read the rules and come in to use, not abuse, library material.

In this connection, an interesting experiment in enriching education opportunities for the superior youth of the nation has been described by Helen D. Simpson.³ A group of above-average and gifted pupils of ninth grade level was given a special course at the University of Utah Library in the use of university library materials. The conclusion was, in part, that "Advanced library instruction in the use of university library materials proved to be a stimulating challenge, apparently and admittedly, and lent greater breadth and depth to participating pupils' educational experience. Ninth grade pupils with superior potentials demonstrated a genuine interest in, and appreciation for, the vast resources that are available in libraries."

So many of the Houston questionnaires emphasized the need for "quiet, well-equipped surroundings," "a nice place to study," "a good place to study—no quiet anywhere else," that it would seem a pity not to provide what all teenagers need in varying amounts—a chance to get away from home. There is surely as much reason to think that young people will respond to a high standard, sympathetically administered, as they will to the attractions of less academic pursuits, enticingly extended.

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